

# Inscriptions

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**Title:** Review of *Real Love* by Duane Rousselle

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**Section:** Reviews

**Abstract:** Review of Duane Rousselle, *Real Love* (Dresden and New York: Atropos, 2021).  
146pp. Softbound. ISBN: 978-1-77763-020-1.

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## Review of *Real Love* by Duane Rousselle

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After the emergence of Slavoj Žižek on the international scene in the early 1990s, with an explicit mission to make the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan applicable to cultural artefacts ranging from Hollywood films to religious rituals, a whole slew of relatively young authors have been pulled into the magnetic field of this “Elvis of cultural theory”, as his publisher styles him. While it is certainly true that celebrities generate their own cult, their followers should nevertheless be judged not on the purity of their faith, but on the independence and substance by which they are able to turn the master’s word into compelling texts.

While Duane Rousselle’s book is an at-times interesting attempt to apply the thought of Lacan and his most garish present-day acolyte, Slavoj Žižek, to love in its multifaceted appearance, it is not given a title that signals it’s belonging to this growing body of homages. To those well-versed in the world of Lacan the main title – “Real Love” – might evoke the so-called Lacanian Real, and thus indicate what to expect; to others, the rather undecided subtitle “Essays on psychoanalysis, religion, society” give little indication of how heavily dependent the author is on Lacan and Žižek. The title of a book doesn’t have to say *everything*, but avoiding clear signposting serves to confuse rather than guide potential readers.

This book from Atropos is unconventional in several senses. Generally book-length publications tend to have right-hand pages paginated with odd numbers and left-hand pages

with even numbers. When Atropos flouts this convention it leads to page numbers being crammed into the spine. As the text is additionally typeset with narrow margins, dense leading (line-spacing), and a kerning that at times appears unnecessarily jammed, the publisher puts an unnecessary strain on the reader’s eye. A second, more substantial convention ignored by this book is to supply documentation for empirically testable assertions. Let’s consider two examples: on page 10 Rousselle claims that “transference and dreams rarely exist within today’s [Lacanian] clinic.” This may be so or not; we would in any case like the author to trust readers to make their own judgement by providing her or him with evidence or documentation. A second example: on page 35 we are presented with the assertion that “today’s subjects suffer not from doubt but rather from certainty.” Again, this may or may not be the case. A bit of referencing would enable readers to assess the claim, and not having to rely on an authoritarian, all-knowing authorial voice.

Rousselle makes his most significant contribution when he adeptly handles Lacanian concepts and combine them with an extensive knowledge of mainstream American sociological theory or contemporary anarchist tendencies. However, since Rousselle’s pen is so utterly immersed in Žižek he succumbs to reproducing not only his master’s terminology and rhetorical sleight-of-hands, but also many of his quirks, including a penchant for skirting (“foreclosing”) the responsibility of making a choice between potentially conflicting propositions, evident in the many forward-slash constellations (“gaze/image”, “image/face”, “curtain/obstacle”, etc., etc.), and his jokes – and not his best ones at that – in a repetitive and

not very funny manner.

Without iterating the oft-heard allegation that post-structuralist writing was beset by jargon and obscurantisms, it is nevertheless clear that Rousselle's is exemplary of a growing solidification of an emerging sub-genre of "post-Lacanian" thought (the term is his own). What we have here is a theoretical edifice, with practical, therapeutic pretences and claims to disciplinary autonomy that nevertheless refuses to partake in any kind of pragmatic-scientific objectivism. When we do find concrete empirical evidence it is more often than not connected to the author's intimate sphere: his divorce, his eating disorder, his therapeutical sessions, the meaning of his first name, etc., making the reader wonder if she or he is presented not so much with an attempt to make new ground for Lacanian psychoanalysis as an example of an analysand tearing his heart out to whomever might be there to listen. As such, this turn-

ing to the intimate sphere is consistent with our time's growing demand for private details, typified by social media's marketisation of everything private and intimate.

The main problem for Rousselle is nevertheless that despite some apt statements ("love compels the subject toward research", page 8; our goal in love is "to find what within the image/face [there it is again, the frequently recurring authorial tendency to avoid choice] is already a response to a primordial trauma", page 39) his textual body is so utterly immersed in the voices of his masters that it too often reads like a summary of graduate school readings, and not sufficiently like a ready-to-publish statement on a much discussed topic in philosophy and psycho-analysis. While Rousselle has certainly read much Lacanian theory his ability to turn a phrase would have benefited from more independent thought and another round of editorial review.

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